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SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND BUSINESS SUCCESS.

BY R. B. VAN CORTLANDT.

THE eyes of the civilized world are fixed at present on American industry, and we, ourselves, in America are almost painfully conscious of the importance of the position we are now occupying on the world-stage. Lately, the various nations of Europe have appeared to vie with each other in proving their friendship to the United States. Friendship among nations, however, is not founded to any great extent upon sentimental considerations; it is rather dictated by self-interest, and we must not, and as a matter of fact we do not, attach very much weight to the protestations of which we are just now the recipients. Europe, or at least the greater part of it, unquestionably views the continued development of our commerce and wealth, and the attendant increase of our power, with feelings in which jealousy, not to use any harsher term, is the chief element, and the minds of many of its political leaders are occupied with devising some means of arresting our progress. It would seem, therefore, that policy would suggest our forbearing to proclaim too loudly the strength of our position, in order not to excite still further unnecessary antagonism. We have a right, nevertheless, to analyze the various factors which have produced the America of to-day, and the existing political, social and industrial order of things; and to consider whether or not they are such as are making for our continued advance in general civilization, and for the strengthening of our position in the family of nations.

My boyhood was spent on the continent of Europe, and I have since been abroad frequently, mingling while there, through relatives and friends, in the social life of the various countries, and, through business connections, meeting many European representatives of different branches of commercial activity. As

a natural result, I have been led to compare the attitude assumed toward commercial pursuits by the corresponding social circles of America and of the countries which are now our chief competitors for the trade of the world. The irresistible deduction from such a comparison is that the United States has a signal advantage over European rivals in this, that conditions in the United States tend to encourage men of the highest intelligence and character not only to choose a business calling at the outset of their career, but also to continue to put forth the best efforts of their mind and vitality long after what is supposed to be the object of business, namely, the acquisition of a fortune, has been attained.

In Europe, on the other hand, the surroundings of a successful man of affairs, who has accumulated large wealth, tend to dampen or destroy the ardor with which in his earlier years fortune was pursued and overtaken.

The two nations with which we are at present in the strongest industrial competition, and against which, therefore, we must measure ourselves with the greatest care, comparing ourselves with them at all points—namely, England and Germany—are both monarchical in the form of their government. The foremost social class in both, therefore, is an aristocracy, which retains its position to some extent irrespective of wealth, and the members of which are brought up to consider their birth as giving them an inherent right to social position. It is admitted, I presume, that in Germany the aristocratic structure of society still flourishes. It would, however, be contended by some, doubtless, that Great Britain, while a monarchy in name, in reality enjoys as much freedom as the United States. Politically, this may be true. Socially, however, England is divided into classes in a way which is unknown in America. The prestige of monarchy could not very well be upheld otherwise, and naturally the peerage holds the first rank. We will put aside entirely the question of the loss of dignity which the choice of a commercial career might entail. That is a consideration which is gradually losing force the world over. It does not, therefore, come within the scope of this article, which purposes only to touch on certain conditions fundamental to the social structure of our own country and that of our principal industrial competitors.

The atmosphere in which the members of the European aris-

ocracy, the leading social class of the Old World, live is one which fosters in the highest degree the pursuit of the various means through which men's lives are made pleasant and interesting, such as sport in all its branches, play, entertainments, travel, etc. Work, consequently—by which is here meant the management of large undertakings—demanding as it does constant and almost undivided attention, is looked upon among them as irksome and disagreeable, and to some extent as incompatible with the highest social position, because the aristocracy is connected with business only to a small extent, the possession of landed property, rather, conferring social distinction.

Let us grant now that success has come to the European man of business, and that his fortune has been achieved. These gratifying results will, alas, be accompanied by the inevitable arrival of middle age, and children will probably have reached a period when the friendships they make will have an important bearing on their future in life. The head of the family, ambitious for his children, is almost irresistibly led to adopt the ways of living and thinking of the aristocracy, thereby consigning the interests of his business to the background, so that his mind is no longer concentrated on its development. In fact, as the lives of the members of the aristocracy are passed largely on country estates, in shooting and hunting, it would be practically impossible for him to devote the requisite time to close attention to business. Let us suppose that our friend has reached the age of fifty. It should be just at this time that his experience, now wide, and his large means should be more than ever prolific in bearing fruit; yet it is, perhaps, just at this time that his energy slackens, and he turns to the cultivation of other interests.

I am not now discussing the pursuit of happiness, nor the wisest method of regulating one's life. Our friend may be quite justified in acting as he does. I wish to speak only of the economic results which necessarily ensue from such a course, as compared with the life of the American business man of equal importance.

Let us look for a moment at the latter:

At the age of fifty, the successful American has developed his business to large proportions, and has acquired the experience and the capital necessary to enable him to fight his way on to further success. He feels himself to be master of the calling

to which his life work has been devoted. His position in the community is constantly improving. His co-operation is sought from many sides; in commerce, in politics, in charity, in society (perhaps the most gratifying tribute of all); his mind is interested as it never has been before; he realizes that his prestige has been derived from his business success, and that the two go hand in hand. No superior class hangs over him like a pall. No supercilious comment instils poison into the brain whose energy is concentrated on "business." His best efforts can be put forth in his commercial or industrial occupation, not only without fear of endangering his position and that of his family, but rather with the certainty that further rewards await him. His employees, too, feeling that their chief is bending all his faculties to perfect the organization and increase the volume of his business, are stimulated on their part to do their best, and the morale of the force is quickened throughout all its parts, be it a banking firm with a score or two of employees, or an extensive industrial enterprise with its thousands.

England at present is complaining bitterly of the narrowness of the policy now dominating its labor unions, whereby the amount of work which the unions allow each man to perform is in many cases not much more than half what he could accomplish by reasonable application. In America, as yet, at least, there has been little complaint on this point from employers. The efforts of our labor unions have been directed toward securing higher wages, shorter hours, or recognition of the union itself by the employers; but the individual working man is generally willing to apply himself with a fair amount of steadiness, and turn out whatever work may result. It is needless to say that this policy is by far the best for him to pursue, as thereby the industrial importance, wealth and prosperity of the United States are increased, and he himself, as a citizen, benefited in every way. If English capitalists would realize that the source of the troubles of which they complain lies not so much in the unions as at the fountain head, through insufficient interest and energy on the part of the chiefs, a real step would be taken in improving English industry.

Considering, therefore, the foundations upon which labor, whether of the head or of the hand, rests in America, as compared with the nations now disputing with us the markets of the

world, I think we may well look forward to the future with confidence. It would seem that republican institutions wisely administered, in a community educated to self-government and to the restraints which its responsibilities impose, furnish the ideal conditions for the best economic results.

The German Emperor, who, whatever we may think of him as an individual, is undeniably master of the kingly craft, with its accompanying necessity of constant watchfulness for the interests and welfare of his Empire, seems thoroughly alive to the superiority of our conditions for supremacy in trade. The attentions which he has been showing to the leaders of German industry, much to the disgust of the aristocracy, can only be aimed at increasing their social consideration and thereby making an industrial career more attractive.

When the framers of our Constitution planned the political structure for the country which they hoped was to be the home of a free and happy people, they could only dimly, at least, have foreseen the economic results which the future held in store for the generations to come. Does it not seem as if Providence were even then at work, silently guiding their minds toward ends greater and more far-reaching than they themselves could possibly have conceived?

R. B. VAN CORTLANDT.